



**Grace Notes  
Scotland**  
Handing on Tradition

## **The End of the Shift** **An Oral History Project by Grace Notes Scotland**

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**Informant (s):** Ian MacGregor  
**Fieldworker:** Margaret Bennett (MB)  
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#### TRACK 1

Intro: 2015 Margaret Bennett talking with Ian MacGregor. Ian is the son of Sheila Stewart, grandson of Belle and Alex Stewart, the Stewarts of Blair.

#### TRACK 2

MB: Ian, when I began this project your Mum told me that she worked in the mill in Blairgowrie.

IM: That's right, yes, she worked in Keithbank Mill and I was there for a winter as an apprentice mechanic. I'd be about 15 at the time.

MB: So you began - I didn't know that - as an apprentice mechanic. What made you choose that?

I.M - Oh because there was no work available and my Mum said, "Here, I can get you a [job].". My Uncle Sandy was the head mechanic there; that's my Dad's brother, and my Mum talked to him and he says, "I'll get you on the start shift", so I started there. I remember I worked - it was like six days a week till 10 at night and my take-home pay was eight pounds fifty-three pence and I felt so good, you know.

MB: What year was that, can you mind?

IM: Well, I was 15; I was born in 1956 so it would be 1971.

MB: £8.53p. -I knew it must have been after decimalisation; but only just!

IM: Just - that winter, it obviously must have been [changed over from] £8-10s, or 10s 6d.

MB: Were there many apprentices?

IM: No, I think there were three of us. There was still two mills working: Keathbank<sup>1</sup>, where we worked and one across the road called Brooklinn<sup>2</sup>, across the river; the river Ericht. So there was only three mechanics; two in Keathbank and one in Brooklinn.

MB: So were the mills linked businesswise?

IM: Oh very much, yes,- Thomson owned them. There were so many mills up and down the Ericht, the river there so many communities they didn't actually make the stuff that they had when they opened. I don't know what we did, what my Mum did with her job, a winder or a spinner or something - she worked on a big, giant machine. It was a terrible job, one of the worst jobs I've ever had to do!

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<sup>1</sup> Photo of Keathbank Jute Mill horizontal engine in the Historic Scotland display, 'Steam engine houses in Eastern Scottish textile mills' by Mark Watson; online: [www.stickssn.org/.../Steam%20engine%20houses%20in%20Eastern%20](http://www.stickssn.org/.../Steam%20engine%20houses%20in%20Eastern%20).

<sup>2</sup> The Jute Store at Brooklinn Mill is now self-catering holiday accommodation, and the former site of the water-powered electricity is now used to supply power. "When the mill was first built in the mid-1840s it had a hydro-mechanical turbine (not a traditional water wheel). That was then replaced with a hydro-electric turbine in the early 20th Century. We have made use of the old mill infrastructure and completed the installation of a new hydro-electric turbine in 2011. The 100kw turbine generates power for the homes at Brooklinn Mill and exports to the grid.see <http://www.brooklinnmill.co.uk>

- MB: So what did they have you do? Can you remember your first day? Let's go back; your first day?
- IM: Yes, I started at 6 in the morning and the old man, he was an old bugger, he was very, very traditional and you weren't allowed to sit, you'd to stand and you had to be working all the time. You weren't allowed to talk. He was just very, very strict. But again, it didn't do you any harm. You were happy to have a job.
- MB: Did they tell you what to wear, was there any overalls?
- IM: You were given an overall, yes. I was given an overall that was older than myself, covered in oil, a hole in the knee, away too big for me.
- MB: Was it a boiler suit?
- IM: A boiler suit, yes. covered in dirt, but I didn't care.
- MB: So you rolled up the trouser legs?
- I.M. - I did - and the  
s and got on with it, yes!
- MB: And can you remember the sort of things?- I mean they must have shown you stuff. What did they show you?
- IM: Well, a card was like a small - (that was the machine my Mum was working on, a carding machine, and it teased whatever kind of material, and they had pins, very, very short pins, that had to be nailed through like a comb, like a giant comb. Well, when the pins broke I had to tap them out again and replace them. And that was so tedious, day in and day out!
- MB: Like a comb, so it's a single row of pins?
- IM: Well there were ten rows.
- MB: So like a brush more than a comb?
- IM: Like a brush, and there were like hundreds of them on the machine that they spun round.
- MB: And who identified the missing ones?
- IM: Oh, the machine stopped You could see them. The mechanic would take them out, take them downstairs and take them - a very laborious job.
- MB: And probably a bit boring.
- IM: Extremely boring! I remember my back was always sore, standing hunched over this machine. But you did it!
- MB: Well, you know, if it could be said to be any merit in it, perhaps it was a good incentive to say, "Well I'm not spending the rest of my life doing this."
- IM: That's exactly how I saw it. It's like, "I don't want to do this." This was for the winter, you know.
- MB: Six months! And as an apprentice taking home your first day's pay, was there a tradition in your family what you did with that first week's pay?
- IM: I gave it all to my Mum and she handed me £1. That was my wages for the week; I got £1 back and I felt so good. I spent it all on sweets and stuff for my brother and my sister. I didn't care about the money.
- MB: No, and you might have been quite proud to be at a stage to be able to contribute to the household.
- IM: Of course, of course, There was no other work in the winter; you had no berries in the winter so it was good to do something. My Dad was working and my Mum was working.
- MB: Where did your Dad work?
- IM: He was actually a joiner. I can't remember where he was working when I was in the mill but he was doing something - he was a joiner. There wasn't a lot of work around then either, but he did have something
- MB: At least the mills. Your Mum would have been very pleased to have your pay.
- IM: She was very happy.

- MB: She worked hard too.
- IM: She worked steady. They finished early. She didn't start till eight o' clock whereas I started at six. She finished at five o' clock, I finished at ten o' clock at night so I only saw her for about an hour during the day.
- MB: Ten o' clock!
- IM: I know, I know, it's unreal. You don't remember things like that until you actually sit down and talk about it.
- MB: Was it just the apprentices who worked those long hours or did -?
- IM: The mechanics as well, because when the mill stopped for the night they were able to go and fix up anything that was a problem, you know.
- MB: So did you eat three meals a day?
- IM: Yes, yes; you got an hour off from seven till eight and you just took sandwiches and you got a cup of tea and stuff. So it was O.K.
- MB: 7 till 8 in the evening? I hope you got a lunch-time as well.
- I.M. Oh yes,, yes.
- MB: So you had two sets of sandwiches?
- IM: Two sets of sandwiches! My Mum would sometimes come back at night, 7 o' clock, and bring me something to eat. Sometimes she brought a plate of soup or some stew or something and I looked forward to that.
- MB: Of course you would.
- IM: She didn't always do it.
- MB: I mean, bearing in mind that she had others going to the school.
- IM: Exactly, exactly!
- MB: She had children to get ready for school
- IM: And clothes to wash –
- MB: Clothes to wash, housework to do, gardening - you name it
- IM: Yes, all ladies did, all mothers did everything like that in those days.
- MB: And her day wouldn't be done at 5 o' clock, by any means, she'd come home and have to start cooking the dinner. Was the family main meal in the evening?
- IM: Yes, during the week when my Mum got home and cooked it.
- MB: I imagine in her young day it might have been in the middle of the day - in your Granny's time?
- IM: That's right, different generation.
- MB: Now, you were young, energetic, and you were still playing football?
- IM: I was starting to play football and looking towards trying to make some money from playing football even at that young age and ..... I did, but that wasn't going to be for a while.
- MB: So back in the mill; did they give you any other tasks beyond replacing those –?
- IM: Yes, once a week we had to close down the lade, because you had to drain the lade and you had to go down and - because it was still worked by the water - and you had to go down and grease the sluice gates. I used to hate that because you were covered in oil and grease. They drained the water but there was still always a foot left of water.
- MB: Did you have to go in in your bare feet?
- IM: You had to go in in your shoes. There was no wellies or nothing. You rolled your trousers up.
- MB: And you were in with your shoes in that water!?
- IM: You couldn't stand in the water because it was really sharp stones. But one good thing, though, there was always fish trapped. When they drained it they didn't actually drain it; they actually used to cut it off at the top, block, so the water would gradually drain out and all the fish would swim down with the water and

there would always be half a dozen good trout, sometimes a salmon, trapped in the small pool that was left. And sometimes we got a fish to take home.

MB: Did you guddle them?

IM: Oh you had a net – it was actually a bucket with holes in it. The old mechanic, he would take most of the fish but he would give you a fish if it was you that was doing it. It was good, it was exciting, it was nice. It was once a week, you did that on a Saturday morning.

MB: So did you keep a special pair of shoes for this operation?

IM: No, no! You only had one pair of shoes. It didn't matter, they dried quick, they dried quick but it was during the winter and there was always snow

MB: It would be bloomin' freezing!

IM: Yes, it was always cold, yes.

MB: I had [in my mind] pictures of you going in with like sand-shoes. or something like that.

IM: I can't remember - I had shoes and socks.

MB: Ordinary shoes! - What did you wear for the rest of the day?- stuffed your shoes with paper?

I.M. (laughing)- Well you did, actually, and dried them. There was a heater inside, a little stove, so you put them in there, in the mechanic's workshop. It's good to remember these things. - I forget them.

MB: It certainly is – you see people think of mills full of spinning machines and weaving; all that – but somebody keeps them going. Did you have to grease them again?

IM: Yes, well, once a week you greased all the machinery that worked the wheel, you know, and you had to grease, a really thick, thick grease to take - there was a slime and you had to do it with your hand. An the gaffer, he 'd come up and he'd look and - and he'd say, "Go and do it again.!" And you'd have to go and put more on, you know.

MB: Was it out of a big tin?

IM: Out of a big tin, yes.

MB: I don't know if it would be the same stuff; I had an uncle who used to refer to that as "cart grease." – a thick, thick grease, and oh, it was like gluey-jelly.

IM: Yes, yellow – it was yellow.

MB: Yellow, was it? That's why he used to call shop butter (or margarine) "cart grease"!

IM: Did they?

MB: Well the old folk, the crofters, made their own butter [at my grandmother's that's what we had.] And when they got their first block of shop butter – [it had none of the fresh taste of the home-made], and as for margarine! - he said, "What in the world is this? Is it cart grease?"

IM: Well, that must have been from the colour!

MB: So that's the stuff; I never knew in my whole life why he called it that - because it was yellow!

IM: That'd be why he called it "cart grease" it was yellow, bright yellow!

MB: (laughing) That explains margarine, then! So that was your two jobs for six months.

IM: For six months, but I didn't last the six months. As soon as the better weather came in I was out of there! I actually went planting potatoes with my grandfather. And that was the best thing - in April we went to plant tatties. And I earned more in two days than I earned all week in the mill. So I was happy to leave.

MB: So this was Perthshire, planting tatties?

IM: Yes, out at Cargill, near the beech hedge and when we were planting the tatties there was a squad of maybe 7 or 8 of us. Cargill was one of the last farms to use horses and they were covering with a plough - two horses and a plough were covering and it was good to see because you knew it was a dying thing. He didn't have a tractor; this is what he used - the horses, and it was good to see.

MB- It's beautiful!

IM: You could see the old ploughman though; it was so difficult because the horse was very strong and the man has to balance this plough - oh!

MB: So was it a pair of horses?

IM: Two horses he had and one plough, yes.

MB: How many furrows, do you remember the plough did?

IM: One, just the one, because he had to guide it you know, the horse.

MB: I remember it well.- They used horses at home [in Skye] as well.

IM: It was so difficult for him, he was so tired.

MB: Yes, but with a squad I'm sure the camaraderie was good.

IM: It was great! and it was all family, all friends, relatives of my grandfather and we just laughed the entire time, you know.

MB: No stress.

IM: No stress, you enjoyed it. Even if it rained you still worked in it because the tatties didnae complain! £4 a day, I was given £4 a day - that was good, that was like £20 a week, you know.

MB: Yes that was, and that was 1971?

IM: 1971 or '72.

MB: Yes, because ten years earlier I worked six days a week and got £5 for the whole week, so you remember those things.

IM: Aye, you remember things like that. I still only got £1 pocket money!

MB: Oh, you still got only £1 – it must have been hugely welcome to your Mum.

IM: Aye, of course, of course. She was planting tatties next to me. She started as well.

MB: Good for her, and so much more healthy in body and mind. And did you always go home at night then?

IM: Yes, oh yes because it was always near Blairgowrie.

MB: So what was the transport?

IM: My grandfather had a van, sometimes we had a lorry; a small lorry and even just cars you know, would pick up two or three people in a car. That's was what you did.

MB: No seat belts then in a lorry, you would perch on the edge or wherever you liked.

IM: No insurance, no tax!

MB: (laughing) No insurance, no tax- I didn't know about these things - carefree times! And did you mug-up in the field, as in making a wee fire?

IM: Oh yes, of course, we always made a fire. My Dad was good for that. He knows where to get sticks and make a nice fire. We had a cup of tea at 9 o' clock

MB: I called it “mug up”. When was starting time on the –?

IM: Eight o' clock; you would start at eight o' clock but you had your tea-break at nine o' clock so that was good.

MB: That was good, then back to work, and everyone with a bucket with the potatoes in it?

IM: No, no, you had a bag tied round your waist and you held it. You held it with one hand, and you took the potatoes and you placed them, spaced them out about a foot apart. You just put one, and you just kept going up the drill in a row of folk.

- MB: I remember it well [from my young days in Skye]. So, one drill after the other, and the last drill - the next drill [that was ploughed] would cover over the one you had just done. It's poetic almost.
- IM: It's good. Where we were there'd be maybe almost about five or six people planting and there was only one plough covering so he would work long into -
- MB: As long as the daylight hours - Did you remember anybody putting a wee handful of fertilizer in?
- IM: Well that was the farmer or maybe the ploughman did it. It wasn't so much fertilizer, it was -
- MB: Was it lime?
- IM: Possibly, possibly.
- MB: It depended on the soil, didn't it?
- IM: Yes, the soil was very, very clay based. It was red so maybe it was lime.
- MB: And can you remember how that was dispensed?
- IM: By hand, no gloves, nothing - just took a handful out the bucket and just like that -
- MB: I remember in Skye, they used to have these bags of lime delivered, again for clay soil but – my bright childhood memories of the whole family planting potatoes [an acre of the croft] – but with us, that was on a much smaller scale than these ones were. But where you were, these would be huge fields.
- IM: They were massive, ten, twelve-acre fields were the smallest at Cargoul.
- MB: That's fantastic! That's a long day.
- IM: It is, it was a good day though. It was easy work. Lifting the potatoes was not so good but planting them was easy, very easy.
- MB: Great,- that would last you for about a month, - to different farms?
- IM: Yes I think so, yes, to different farms round about Blairgowrie. And by that time we knew a lot of people up by Dunkeld, so we worked around Dunkeld a fair bit as well ... Murthly and Stanley, you know, we knew a lot of people there. If you did a good job one farmer would recommend you to another farmer. It was good that way.
- MB: Murthly and Stanley, too. Of course in Stanley you were near the mill, there. Did you meet any millworkers while you were there?
- IM: Not really.
- MB: Straight into the field and back! And did you know there was bleach fields Luncarty?
- IM: I never knew that.
- MB: It's amazing, neither did I until this project – Luncarty bleach fields.
- IM: I know my Granny picked flax around there. Yes she did. Many times she talked about going to the flax. And I said, “Where did you pick flax?” “Oh along the Tay, round about Stanley, round about K....., they were growing flax. I round about that area.” They were growing flax, because I remember many times, her saying “we liked when there used to be flax.” I was not sure what flax was, to be honest with you.
- MB: It's just died out nowadays.
- IM: Yes. But she said it was good going to the flax. A lot of travellers went to the flax so obviously they made good money.
- MB: Yes, I've never seen them harvest it in Scotland, certainly, but when she used to talk about picking” flax, I wonder what that meant. [NOTE: ‘pick’ is not what she said, but it’s what Ian asked her.]
- IM: I don't know- maybe it’s like s picking cotton. She never said, “picking”; she said, “We went to the flax.”

- MB: Oh, because they scythed it or sheared it and then they would do stooks of it. She would be stooking it. They would be picking up bundles of it and standing it.
- IM: Gathering flax, gathering flax.
- MB: Yes, and that song, "The band of Shearers" is not about sheep; it's about grain. They sheared it. Anyway, so she was at the flax too, that's very interesting. Your grandmother was born in 1902 or something.
- IM: 1906.
- MB: 1906, so we're probably talking about the Thirties, before the war, when she was a young woman?
- IM: Yes, when she wrote "The Berryfields of Blair" – 1928. I have it handwritten, you know.
- MB: Oh my, yes, it's wonderful really. Those situations of work; the mill, the flax, the tatties - they all had a social side.
- IM: Very much so, they're all connected.
- MB: And a feeling of connectedness. You'd all sit down and have your tea together, you'd sing together.
- IM: It brought families together that came to it, like tattie-picking in October, the winter. There was no berries, but you still had a way of coming together to earn a wee shilling, you know.
- MB- Did you ever hear any tattie songs?
- IM: Not really – there would be singing. Like I said, my Granny and my Grandfather always had friends and relatives that would turn up, and they would come and spend a weekend there, and put their tents up, or their caravans - pull their caravan in. So there was always a ceilidh; always had music going on. And there was folk singers turning up non stop from England, you know – Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger. Such a range of wonderful people .... I as a young lad, didn't pay much attention to it but they were there several times. There was always singing!
- MB: And you had learned the pipes by that time.
- IM: I had learned the pipes by then, and I was soon heading off with my Grandfather up by Loch Lochy.
- MB: Who taught you to play the pipes?
- IM: My Grandfather- taught me to play, just the *canntaireachd*, then I went to another lad called Bob Pitcaithly. I was in the Boy's Brigade and he was the piper there, and he was a friend of my Grandfather's. My Grandfather was always busy, he was always busy, so he never had a lot of time going, teaching pipes, and I said, "Listen, there's a man at the BBs, Bob Pitcaithly, who says he can teach me the pipes." "Bob's a good man, he says, "Go there." So he said to Bob – his son was a Queen's piper, Andrew Pitcaithly, I never met him –
- MB: Yes, but the BB has done amazing things for boys.
- IM: They have, you're right; I played football with them as well.
- MB: More pipes and sport - what a healthy thing to be at.
- IM: Very much, very much!
- MB: So you met once a week, I presume, and then nights for the pipes?
- IM: A couple of times a week I went out to his cottage – he lived on the Cupar Angus Road, and I would go there. He was a nice old lad, you know. His wife made me tea and biscuits and stuff like that. Yes, it was good.
- MB: I gather the Boy's Brigade didn't charge boys for that, for piping lessons. There was no fees?
- IM: Nothing, no nothing!
- MB: And still the same.

- IM: My grandson is in the Anchor Boys, they call them, he's an Anchor Boy and the next stage is the Boy's Brigade.
- MB: Isn't that marvellous! I'm so glad to hear they're still going.
- IM: They are still going, yes, very much. They're good, they keep the boys organized, gives them a bit of respect.
- MB: Now, if we'd to return to the mill – Did your Mum go back to the mill after the berries?
- IM: Yes, well my Mum, yes she did. She would stop in the summer and then – because they always wanted people that knew the job, so she could go back and have another winter in there 'cos there was no work outside. And they welcomed people back because they knew it wasn't easy to [replace them ].... In the summer, especially when the berries came along, and people could make much more money, the mills knew they would lose half their workforce to the berries.
- MB: Did Cathie work in the mill?
- IM: She never worked in the mill, I don't think. No. My Uncle Jimmy [Higgins], her husband, he always had a good job, and my cousin Alex, he worked with his dad; they worked on the overhead lines. They earned good money.
- MB: That would be the hydro?
- IM: The hydro, exactly, in the '70's and '80's.
- MB: There was a lot of that going on.
- IM: Very much so, still goes on! And they made good money. That was one thing, they were getting more money than just berry picking.
- MB: Did you ever get a .....?
- IM: Well I was up standing like Rob Roy, on the shores of Loch Lochy playing the pipes with my Grandfather by that time, so I didn't care.

### TRACK 3

- MB: So, to the time with your Grandfather I mean, he was such a wonderful musician. How were the summers with him?
- IM: The summers were absolutely the most amazing summers I have ever had. And I'm not just saying that because of my Grandfather. It wasn't just him. It was like auld Willie, Willie MacPhee, and so many other friends and travellers that were up at Loch Lochy, Glencoe, the Commandos Monument – we lived up there every year for over 20 years, for about four months each summer, and you just can't describe that. Looking back now, it made me who I am, whether that's good or bad, I don't care.
- MB: It's like the most wonderful gift, all that. Don't you think so?
- IM: Well, I was so fortunate to be able to do that. Now I realize just the value of it all. At the time ,you just get on with it, you didn't pay much attention. And now you realize it was something that held ye.
- MB: And was home a caravan?
- IM: Oh yes, all summer.
- MB: Can you mind the caravan?
- IM: Yes, I can remember we had two up there, at one time - a wee striped Musketeer. That was the caravan we lived in.
- MB: Yes, I remember those 16-or so foot caravans.
- IM: About 14-16 feet, it was. My Grandfather, when he first went up, when I first went up with him, he didn't have a caravan at the beginning of the summer. He would just sleep in the back of, he had an old Austin A60 estate car, and we just slept in the back.
- MB: Yes, flatten it out – you can.

IM: And me and him slept there all week. We drove down in one night, stayed one night at home, and back the next morning, in time to start piping again that day. And loved it! The thing about Loch Lochy, it rained so much, uh!

MB: How about the midgies?

IM: They weren't too bad at Loch Lochy. There was usually a breeze along the loch, you know, and that was good at night because it was cold as well. Glencoe, you were troubled with midgies there.

MB: When Willie was there, was Bella there?

IM: Bella was always there, and Isaac and Jimmy, their sons, and they just had the time of their lives!

MB: They would have had a caravan then?

IM: Well, at first- it was really Willie and my Grandfather, because they played together, whereas I wouldn't play. They only had two pipers. So I would drive to maybe, the Commandos, or I would be in Glencoe. Big Jack Townsley, Big Jeck, as they called him, he played in Glencoe, but there was more than one lay-by in Glencoe.

MB: Ah, I see, so there was a piper in each?

IM: There was a piper in each lay-by, yes. It was good.

MB: So full Highland rig?

IM: Full Highland rig, you looked the part. You maybe didn't sound it but you looked it!

MB: You know, I remember Willie with the Busby hat and everything. How about your Grandfather – did he wear a Busby?-

IM: Yes, he wore a feathered bonnet

MB: That's not a Busby, is it?

IM: That's not a Busby; a Busby is like for the Guards.

MB: Yes, but Willie had one of them. Where would he get that?

IM: (laughing) Probably stole it at some Highland games or something! No, I'm joking! (laughs)

MB: No, he said he did some time in the Army. So he'd know how to find one of those. Somebody may have given it to him. And my word, he was handsome in it! So was your Grandfather a good-looking man. So your Grandfather, Alex Stewart, he had a feathered bonnet?

IM: A feather bonnet. Ostrich feathers. It was the Guards wore the Busbys, the Coldstream Guards, the ones at Buckingham Palace, and stuff. But the feather bonnets were the ones that the Highlanders wore. They were light.

MB: And he lived in the kilt all summer?

IM: Yes he did. He made good money, of course. You wouldn't do it unless you made something.

MB: I remember, I mean, he did that for years, and Willie had a motor, eh– it wasn't a caravan that you towed. He had one that you drove.

IM: A caravanette. I think they all had various contraptions throughout the years because they wouldn't last very long, you know.

MB: I remember Willie going on to the road to where my Mother was living – way over in Balquhiddy, my Mother and my uncle. [We had all been at a ceilidh] and I think they'd asked if they wanted a room for the night. I mean, my mother and uncle only stayed in a two bedroom house, so my uncle said, "Well, I'll sleep on the couch and Willie and Bella can have the bed." "No need," they said, "We've got the caravanette." Did Bella do the cooking ..?

IM: Oh yes she did, her and my Granny - she was always there of course. She sold heather, white heather. She used to buy pots of heather and cut heather and would make up small things.

MB: Yes, with the tartan ribbon?

IM: A wee tartan ribbon or a wee bit silver paper and she used to put in a wee purple kind of flower and it looked nice, you know.

MB: Beautiful; I can remember those very well. I had no idea she had to buy it because white heather was so rare, growing in the wild. There was a few spots near us in Skye where you could get it. My uncle knew where to go, but he would never tell us, never tell *anybody*, in case we'd tell anybody else!

IM: And it would disappear.

MB: And he would bring it home every year, and we'd have another wee bit white heather off the hill. But I used to wonder where the travellers or the tinkers, as we used to call them, got all this heather.

IM: Well they bought it from a small garden place, near Perth, just outside Perth on the back road to Methven. That's where they bought it. They would buy it there and sell the pots. She would buy them for about 40 p. and sell them for £1, so she made very good profit. She would sell maybe ten or twelve pots a day, and that was good money; that was over and above the piping money.

MB: That's fantastic!

IM: Eventually we progressed to selling Scottish goods as well – gifts, and tea towels and funny hats, and things. It all added to the thing, it was good.

MB: Was it in the winter then, that Willie made the baskets?

IM: Willie made baskets and that kind of stuff. There was a family, Burke that lived near the Commandos, a very nice family, and they sold baskets from a big lay-by there. They bought baskets from a market in Glasgow, and if they got them damaged they would come and see Willie to come and fix it. So umpteen times that I would go and see Willie he would be fixing a basket for them. He wouldn't charge them a penny; never bothered!

MB: One time I was visiting him in Perth (at the site by the Almond) and he offered me a basket he had made, and do you know this, to my eternal regret I said, "Oh no, Willie, that took you hours and hours to make. You could sell it." You know, when I look back I realize he *wanted* to give it to me.

IM: Yes, do you wish you'd taken it?

MB: Oh, do I wish I'd taken it? Somebody else probably scooped it up and –And also I'd had that close a friendship with them, and that's what it meant. He wanted to give it to me.

IM: You regret that a wee bit?

MB: I do, I do. It didn't lessen anything we had between us. I thought the world of himself and Bella .... Back to the mill again –

#### TRACK 4

You say your Mum carried on working there, this machine she worked on, that's pretty hard on a body?

IM: A carding machine, yes, it was quite a physical - you needed to be quite strong to move it. I remember going up a couple of times, because we worked below in the workshops, underneath the shop floor, and I would go up a couple of times to do something and she always went, "Hello, son" and she would talk to me, but she was always at it, working. They had to keep going, and watch what was going on because they didn't want it to stop, you know. Total concentration and there was no kind of safety measures in place that I saw and sometimes she would maybe scratch her wrist or something if she had her hand too close. So you had to be very aware of that, keep your concentration while the machine was on

MB: Did you ever hear of any accidents?

- IM: Not while I was there. There obviously were accidents but all in all, the ladies that worked there, they knew what they were doing.
- MB: It was all women?
- IM: It was all women that worked in the [spinning and machines].... There was men taking the bales to be teased, and then they would remove what was after it.
- MB: It would be cotton in her day, was it?
- IM: I'm not sure. Creamy white, yes it was. Maybe it was cotton.
- MB: Do you remember the women covered up their hair with scarves or whatever?
- IM: I think so. I don't think it was compulsory though; I don't think it was an issue.. I can't remember my Mum having any kind of head-square on - maybe it was for the Works benefit.

#### TRACK 5

- MB: And one last question about the mill: Can you remember how long your Mum worked there?
- IM: At one time she would probably start work in the mill after the tattie lifting. I would say maybe October , and then she would work till April. She did that more than once. She did it quite a few times. She was in there for a few years, off and on.
- MB: And of course, they'd begun singing by then as a family and were just emerging as 'The Stewarts o Blair'.
- IM: That's right, doing more folk clubs and festivals and travelling a bit further.
- MB: And that makes life more interesting. It doesn't necessarily mean you're going to earn more!
- IM: No, no, but it was much more enjoyable than working in the mill. I remember even before she worked in the mill, in the Sixties, we were living in [Sheffield] and my Mum, my Granny and Grandfather and my Auntie Kate, they would go a tour to London, to England in the early Sixties, the mid-Sixties, and they would get £5 each a club. They were over the moon with that! They would go away for maybe two weeks and come back with all this money – £5 for just one night. It was such good times. They were tired obviously, because sometimes they had to sleep in the car. People would go, and do a Folk Club, and then the people couldn't afford to put them up so they would just sleep in the car.
- MB: That's not easy.
- IM: No, it's not easy when there's four of you, I know. But what could you do?
- MB: You said something at the beginning which I think I totally agree with - you said, "It didnae do me any harm and it maybe made me who I am."
- IM: It does, It shapes you a wee bit, you know. You learn from the good times, you learn from the bad times and, as you say, you think, "I don't want to do this thing, I want the next." But that's one of the good things you can take out of it.
- MB: And possibly learn to appreciate and learn the value of things.
- IM: The value of things - you worked for it, you've earned it.
- MB: And it doesn't just land on your plate for nothing.

end of recording